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MASTER GOLDSMITHS OF THE RENAISSANCE: THEIR MODELS AND DESIGNS

November 2, 1982 - March 20, 1983

Goldsmiths of 16th- and 17th-century Europe achieved a level of artistry in their work which has seldom, if ever, been surpassed. Stimulated by the increased availability of precious metals and stones from the New World, and responding to demands for luxury goods from the nobility and a wealthy merchant class, they vied with one another to create original works of art--exquisite jewelry and other sumptuous objects of silver and gold. Talented craftsmen adapted the models of the masters or drew inspiration for their work from drawings and prints of ornamental motifs often gathered into books.

Master Goldsmiths of the Renaissance: Their Models and Designs, an exhibition on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art through March 20, 1983, presents choice examples of the goldsmiths' art and examines their sources of inspiration. Selected from Cleveland Museum and private collections by Patrick M. de Winter, Curator of Early Western Art, are 122 works by 15th-, 16th-, and 17th-century Italian, French, German, Netherlandish, and English artists. Included are jewelry, tableware and ceremonial cups, medals and plaques, devotional objects, and arms and armor. Complementing them are prints and drawings of designs which provided patterns for the goldsmith and painted portraits showing how jewelry was worn during the Renaissance.

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Classical works of art inspired the Italian Renaissance goldsmiths, whose designs were gradually adopted by their counterparts north of the Alps, first in France, and then in the Netherlands, southern Germany and England. In some areas, however, such as northern Germany, estranged from Rome during the Reformation and less receptive to Italian influence, goldsmiths clung more persistently to Gothic forms.

The most important antique source of decoration on which Renaissance artists drew were grotesques (so-called because they were found in Roman ruins below ground in what were thought to be grottoes)--fanciful mural or sculptural decorations of interwoven human, animal, and plant forms. The Renaissance adaptation of grotesque ornament was recorded in prints like those of the Italian artist Nicoletto Rosex da Modena, shown here, and disseminated throughout Europe. Grotesques, which decorate many of the objects in this exhibition, remained popular until the 19th century.

While it was a tradition among Italian artists to design the objects they fashioned, goldsmiths in the north, particularly in German-speaking regions, sought inspiration in pattern books containing designs produced by master goldsmith-engravers, such as the Nuremberg artists Wenzel Jamnitzer, Peter Flötner, Virgil Solis, Mathias Zündt, and Paul Flindt. The influence which these engraved designs had on the work of German goldsmiths is strikingly illustrated in two works in the exhibition. A print of Paul Flindt's design for a beaker-shaped cup with decoration of strapwork and putti heads is displayed next to a gilt silver beaker, made in Augsburg, which is closely related to it in form and ornamentation.

Flindt was also noted for his designs for the tall ornate standing cups known as willkomm cups used in German-speaking regions on formal occasions when wine was

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offered to important guests. An example in the exhibition, a gilt silver covered cup, possibly crafted by Virgil Solis or Mathias Zündt, is one of the most splendid in existence. The willkomm cup and other examples of highly ornamented cups, such as the gilt silver double cup by the Nuremberg goldsmith Alexander Treghart, were sometimes commissioned for the Wunderkammer (gallery of rarities) of a wealthy prince or for display on the sideboard of a burgher's home.

Widely circulated prints depicting subjects from history, classical mythology, and the Bible, sometimes based on famous compositions, such as Marcantonio Raimondi's engravings after the paintings of Raphael, also served as models for the goldsmith. An excellent example of this type of borrowing is a 16th-century gilt copper locket of South German workmanship, decorated with scenes derived from engravings of paintings by Titian. Another fine example is a superbly wrought enameled gold hat jewel, made in France around 1560. The subject depicted on the jewel--the abduction of Helena--is taken from a painting of about 1555 by Nicolo dell'Abate which decorated the château of François I at Fontainebleau.

Because of the widespread dissemination of ornamental prints, forms and motifs developed in one country easily spread to others. In addition, there was a constant international exchange of artists; several German and Flemish goldsmiths, for example, worked in Florence at the court of Cosimo I de'Medici, while Italian artists, such as the famed Benvenuto Cellini, were invited to France. The German Hans Holbein the Younger, court painter of Henry VIII of England, helped introduce Renaissance modes in England through the jewelry and other objects he designed for the London goldsmiths. Holbein's portraits of Henry's courtiers, incidentally, include some of the finest representations of Renaissance jewelry. Several portraits in this exhibition, notably one of an Elizabethan lady by the English

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artist Isaac Oliver, the German artist Hans Mielich's Portrait of Maria Kitscher von Oelkofen, and the Italian artist Agnolo Bronzino's Portrait of a Young Woman of the Court of Cosimo I de'Medici, illustrate the lavish use of jewelry at this time.

Goldsmiths did not work with only precious metals. Some, like the Augsburg goldsmith-etcher Daniel Hopfer, decorated arms and armor for ceremonial use. Hopfer's stylized floral motifs may have served as models for the embellishment of a section of horse armor in the exhibition. Other noteworthy examples of the armorer's craft are a wheel lock from a musket inlaid with an exquisite pattern of floral designs in gold, perhaps made for a member of the Hapsburg family, and a morion (helmet) etched with arabesques and medallions with scenes from ancient history, made for the personal guard of Christian II, Elector of Saxony.

During the course of the 16th century, goldsmith-designers began to reject classical ideals of harmony and proportion and tended to experiment with more adventurous and mannered forms, partly to satisfy the increasingly sophisticated tastes of their patrons. As Dr. de Winter explains, "Design never played a more important part in the goldsmith's art than at this period. Not only was originality of form expected, but an object was judged by the variety, the fantasy, and the extravagance of its ornament." A number of the late 16th-century prints in this exhibition are designs for such objects, which, having little or no functional purpose, are clearly intended to be admired as works of art.

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